

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

March, 2024 Volume 5 Number 3

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

The heralds of Spring portend its imminent arrival. Blossoms bloom, and birds pass through in their journey north, while others arrive home at FNC. Spring always lifts my spirits, only tempered by the reality of our need for more rain or the threat of a belated hard freeze. The fortuitous timing of our fall/winter rains offered hope to the wildflowers, but the insignificant amounts leave us in Extreme Drought status with trees thirsting for adequate amounts to support the burden of pushing out spring foliage. I will delight in the emergin bluebonnets and greening brasses, but keep dancing for more Spring rains.

As to FFNC business, we welcome another new Board member, Laura Grant, as a Director. Laura has provided volunteer labor in the Pollinator Garden for awhile, and we are extremely pleased to have her offer her talents and increased commitment to FFNC leadership.

Our Interpretive Center project continues to progress as the Design Review Committee of Fredericksburg city government reviews our plans, and the City Attorney creates a draft Development Agreement for approval by City Council. At this point, we probably will not make it to a Council meeting before mid-April or early May. We would love to move faster, but our advancement forward is continuous and deliberate. In April, we should have plans to share with you.

Meanwhile, come take a hike, and let Nature raise your spirits too!

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this Issue:

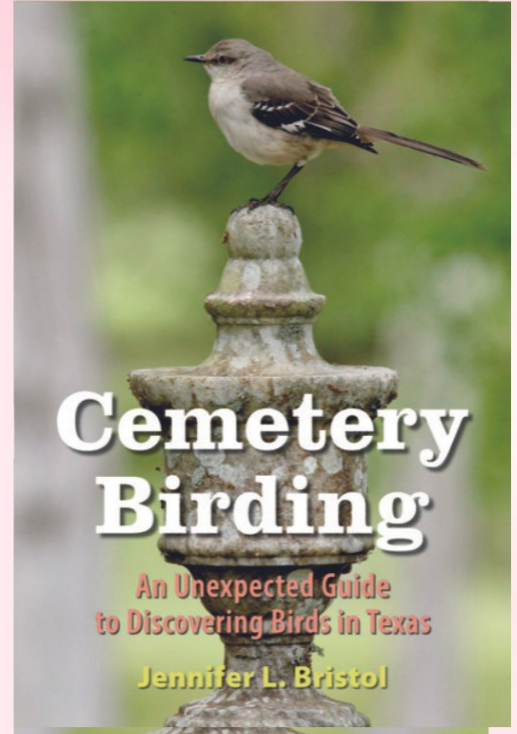
- Cemetery Birding Workshop
- FFNC Volunteer Activities
- Volunteer Spotlight—Gordon Downey
- Harbingers & Early Blloms of Spring
- Spring Birds at FNC
- Mystery Mammal
- What's this Bill? Scissor-tailed Flycatcher



Discovering Birds in Unlikely Places!

It might seem unlikely that a place designed for the departed could be teeming with life. Cemeteries have a long history of serving the dual purpose of honoring the deceased while also providing a space for the living to gather and grieve in the embrace of nature. Touted as some of the earliest public parks in the country -- with mature trees, open grasslands, meadows of wildflowers -- cemeteries are also attractive to birds and wildlife. In an age of distractions and disconnection, cemeteries create a sense of place where visitors can reconnect with nature while exploring the cultural history of a region. For bird watchers, cemeteries offer easy walking, open spaces to peer into habitats, and a peaceful place to feel the breeze and listen to the quiet conversations of nature.

From Beaumont to Amarillo and beyond, the cemeteries of Texas are alive with the sound of birdsong, and the FFNC invite you to join us and author Jennifer Bristol as she takes us on a birding journey that combines an extraordinary blend of Texas history and culture as well as tips and advice on what birds can be seasonally observed while treading carefully and ethically when exploring these sacred spaces.



“Cemetery Birding”

A Nature Series Workshop Sponsored by the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

Presenter: Jennifer L. Bristol

Saturday, March 16, 2024 - 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

AgriLife Extension Office - Fredericksburg*

****(Following the presentation, there will be a Book Signing and optional field trip to Greenwood Cemetery in Fredericksburg. Field trip limited to the first 30 people who register).***

To register, contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com

Approved for a total of Three (3) Hours of TMN AT Credit: Presentation 2 and Cemetery Walk 1.



JENNIFER L. BRISTOL is the former director of the Texas Children in Nature Program at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Bristol is the 2018 and 2019 recipient of the Most Valuable Birder in the Great Texas Birding Classic and she guides walks for Travis Audubon. In addition to *Cemetery Birding*, she is also the author of *Parking Lot Birding: A Fun Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas* and is a contributor to *Texas State Parks the First 100 Years 1923-2023*. She resides in Austin, Texas.



OUR MISSION STATEMENT: *“To enhance, protect and interpret the natural ecosystems of the Texas hill country while providing educational and quality of life opportunities for members of the community and visitors.”*

FFNC Announcements Save the Date!!

Friday, April 26, 2024 - 2024 Bioblitz at FNC

In conjunction with City Nature Challenge—San Antonio Area

Look for full details in the April newsletter.

“City Nature Challenge is an annual, global event that encourages people in cities around the world to observe and document the biodiversity present in their urban environments using iNaturalist.” Learn more at <https://cnc-sa.org/>

We will start the day with a presentation on Purple Martins by Kevin Pillow, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited—Kerrville.

We will then have two guided hike options.

- Using the innaturalist application, one group will walk the trails & gardens to view, identify, & record species. This is a great opportunity to learn to use this amazing tool. Learn more about it at <https://cnc-sa.org/learn/>
- For those who just want a guided hike, there will be a second group who will not be recording species and can simply take in the beauty of FNC trails and gardens.

March 21—Visit the FFNC booth at the City Hall Open House and “Touch a Truck” event sponsored by the City of Fredericksburg. The free, family friendly event lasts from 3:30pm-7:00pm at Marktplatz. FFNC will offer a fun “Wings” photo opportunity along with giveaways for the kids. For more information, go to <https://www.fbgtx.org/871/City-Hall-Open-House-Touch-A-Truck>

Fun Tuesdays at FNC

Typical tasks involve **gardening skills** and **trail maintenance**, but no experience is necessary. Use it as a learning opportunity. Work in whatever area you choose for as long as you choose. We work some and have a lot of fun outside in the beauty of nature. It’s good exercise for the body and great therapy for the soul. If you would like to join us at the park, we would love to have you!

Work sessions are typically scheduled for Tuesdays at 8:30am.

The Trail and Garden Crews are working in full Spring mode these days.

Contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com to receive a weekly email notification about scheduled work tasks for the coming week.





"There is increasing evidence that exposure to plants and green space, and particularly to gardening, is beneficial to mental and physical health..." Royal College of Physicians

FFNC Volunteers in Action—Spring Cleanup in the Garden



Above: Katie Collins & Sandi Kennedy

Below: Laura King Photos by Dot Maginot

Happy Gardeners!





'One cannot help but see trails and natural spaces in a different light after a day of hard work and tender loving care.'

SUZANNE BARTLETT HACKENMILLER, *Forest Bathing*, 2019

FFNC Volunteers in Action—New Handrail & Trail Re-route



Photo by Dot Maginot



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Take a hike & check out the new trail section near the entrance kiosk!

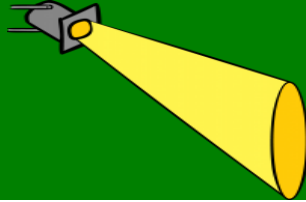
The Trail Crew installed a new handrail & re-routed the trail that descends west from the entrance kiosk. The re-route eliminated a steep section, and with the addition of the new handrail, will provide a more accessible and safer trail.

Thanks to the Trail Crew which includes Frank Garcia, Mark Moldrawski, Billy Guin, Gordon Downey, Carl Luckenbach, Ken Dexter, and Lonnie Childs.

Photos:

Upper Left—Frank Garcia & Mark Moldrawski

Upper Right—Mark Moldrawski, Frank Garcia, & Billy Guin



Volunteer Spotlight

Gordon O. Downey M.D.

BACKGROUND:

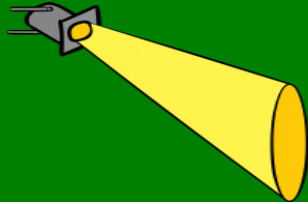
I was born in Germany to American military parents, and I left Germany at six weeks of age. Kansas and northern Virginia were my home until I was eight. After my father retired from the Army, we moved to San Antonio. The next 13 years were spent there and culminated in graduation from Trinity University with a Bachelor's Degree in Biology. Trinity is where I met my wife (of 52 years.) We married during my years at Southwestern Medical School, which I attended via an Army Scholarship program.

Upon completion of medical school, we were off to Hawaii for 4 years of residency in Ob/Gyn at Tripler Army Medical Center. Upon graduation from Residency, I was assigned to the Army hospital in Frankfurt, Germany where I was on staff as an Obstetrician Gynecologist, providing gynecologic and obstetrical care delivering babies in the same hospital where I was born 30 years earlier! From Germany, we moved back to San Antonio to Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) where I was the Chief of Benign Gyn surgery and the Residency Director for the Department of Ob/Gyn. Desiring further surgical challenge and expertise, I took a 3 year Fellowship in Gynecologic Oncology in Minneapolis at the University of Minnesota. During this time, I returned again to Germany for training in advanced surgical techniques with a very accomplished and well known German Professor of Surgery.

Upon graduating from the Fellowship program, I was assigned to an Army teaching hospital in the Pacific northwest. There, I completed my subspecialty Boards, and for a time, I was the only Board Certified gynecologic oncologist in the Army. Again, I was teaching Residents, and I also participated in gynecologic cancer research through the National Cancer Institute (NCI) as a Principal Investigator. I retired from the Army after 21 years of service and began 25 years of private practice in Grand Rapids, Michigan. There, I trained Residents and Medical Students in gynecologic cancer surgery and treatments. I remained a Principal Investigator for the NCI and rose to Clinical Professor in Ob/Gyn at Michigan State University. I was surprised and delighted to have an annual Excellence in Surgical Teaching award named in my honor.

When it came time to retire in 2017, we came back to our ranch west of Blanco. This was coming back "home" for us to family and friends. Since arriving at the ranch, we have redone the main house, added a guest house and generally made the ranch into our unique Texas home. My time has been occupied with volunteering with Lunches of Love, which means cooking and delivering meals to disabled elderly in our area; serving on the EMS Board for Blanco County; COVID vaccine administration; and serving on the Rapid





Volunteer Spotlight

Gordon O. Downey M.D. (continued)

Response Team for West Blanco County to support needs of our firefighters while they are engaged in a lengthy firefight.

INTEREST IN NATURE:

Outside of medicine, my interests have been varied and include travel, wine, hunting, fishing, and scuba diving. These activities fueled my desire to deepen my understanding of botany, conservation, and the different ecological systems I have encountered. Supporting these interests was travel to: hunting and fishing areas in Alaska, Canada, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Texas; vineyards in France, Germany, California, Oregon, Washington, and Texas; diving in Cayman Islands, Turks & Caicos, Mexico, Belize, Hawaii, Tahiti, Maldives and Australia.

After moving back home to live on our ranch, and despite a primary and secondary education in Texas with exposure to local hunting and fishing and the ranch, the gaps in my knowledge regarding local ecology and conservation became apparent. I realized I wanted to leave the land in my care not just as good as I found it, but hopefully improved, if possible. The concept of “stewardship” developed as I progressed through the TMN learning process. I had heard of the Texas Master Naturalist organization and classes through educational lectures and workshops I had attended locally. Discussing TMN with a close friend, Tom Burke, he became interested. I encouraged him to enroll. He enjoyed and appreciated the course and then encouraged me to also enroll and become a Texas Master Naturalist. The coursework of TMN has proven invaluable to widening my understanding and appreciation of not just my environment, but also of the value and enjoyment I have always found, and still do, in formal education.

I began to volunteer as part of the TMN requirements, and I have come to realize how much this work has also furthered my educational goals. A great deal was learned volunteering at the Old Tunnel State Park and I appreciate Nyta’s time spent on tutoring me. When I began working with Grace Waggener and Lonnie Childs at FFNC, I felt like I had found my niche.

I am learning something with every project, whether it is weeding the pollinator garden or helping to maintain and improve the nature trail. In addition to providing help with labor, I am learning techniques and skills that I can utilize on my own property.

Recently, I have been attending FFNC Advisory Board meetings where planning is ongoing about the new Interpretive Center. I look forward to continuing to volunteer at FFNC with a dedicated group of volunteers. I believe all of our work results in a positive impact on our community, and I am delighted to be a part of TMN and FFNC.



"Birds chirping around you is a beautiful realization that life is incredibly good. Let this sound be a gentle break in your routine."

Hiral Nagda

Be Kind to Our Avian Amigos!



On February 16th, the first of our intrepid Purple Martins returned from their winter sojourn in South America. Their cheerful chatter stirs the heart & sounds Spring is coming!

Lights Out Gillespie County!!

The spring bird migration has started, so it's time to implement measures to reduce mortality in the billions of migratory birds that fly over Texas annually.

Full Migration: March 1 – June 15

Peak Migration: April 22 – May 12

Following are some actions that you can take.

- Turn off all non-essential lights from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. each night during migration season.
- Do not use landscape lighting to light up trees or gardens where birds may be resting.
- For essential lights (security & safety lighting), use the following dark skies friendly lighting practices:
 - > Aim lights down;
 - > Use lighting shields to direct light downwards and avoid light shining into the sky or trees;
 - > Use motion detectors and sensors so lights are only on when you need them;
 - > Close blinds at night to reduce the amount of light being emitted from windows.

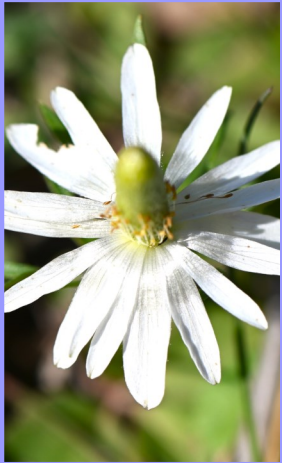
For more information, go to <https://tx.audubon.org/urbanconservation/lights-out-texas>

Harbingers of Spring



- 1 *Agarita Mahonia trifoliolata*
- 2 Texas Mountain Laurel
Sophora secundiflora
- 3 Mexican Plum *Prunus mexicana*
- 4 Texas Redbud
Cercis canadensis var. texensis

Early Bloomers



Windflower—White & Purple
Anemone berlandieri



Dwarf Verbena *Glandularia pumilis*



Bluebonnet rosettes awaiting rain capture dewdrops. *Lupinus texensis*



Texas Ragwort or Groundsel
Senecio ampullaceus

Recent Raptors at FNC

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*
Photo by Bill Lindemann, 2016



Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
Photo by Bill Lindemann, Alaska 2013



Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*
Photo by Dot Maginot, 2024



Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Photo by Bill Lindemann, 2016





"Birds chirping around you is a beautiful realization that life is incredibly good. Let this sound be a gentle break in your routine."
Hiral Nagda

Other Recent Avians at FNC

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii*
Winter resident



Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*
Permanent resident



Northern Cardinals *Cardinalis cardinalis*
Mr. & Mrs. Cardinal
Permanent residents



Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
Year round resident (not typical)
nesting on Live Oak island



Photos by Dot Maginot

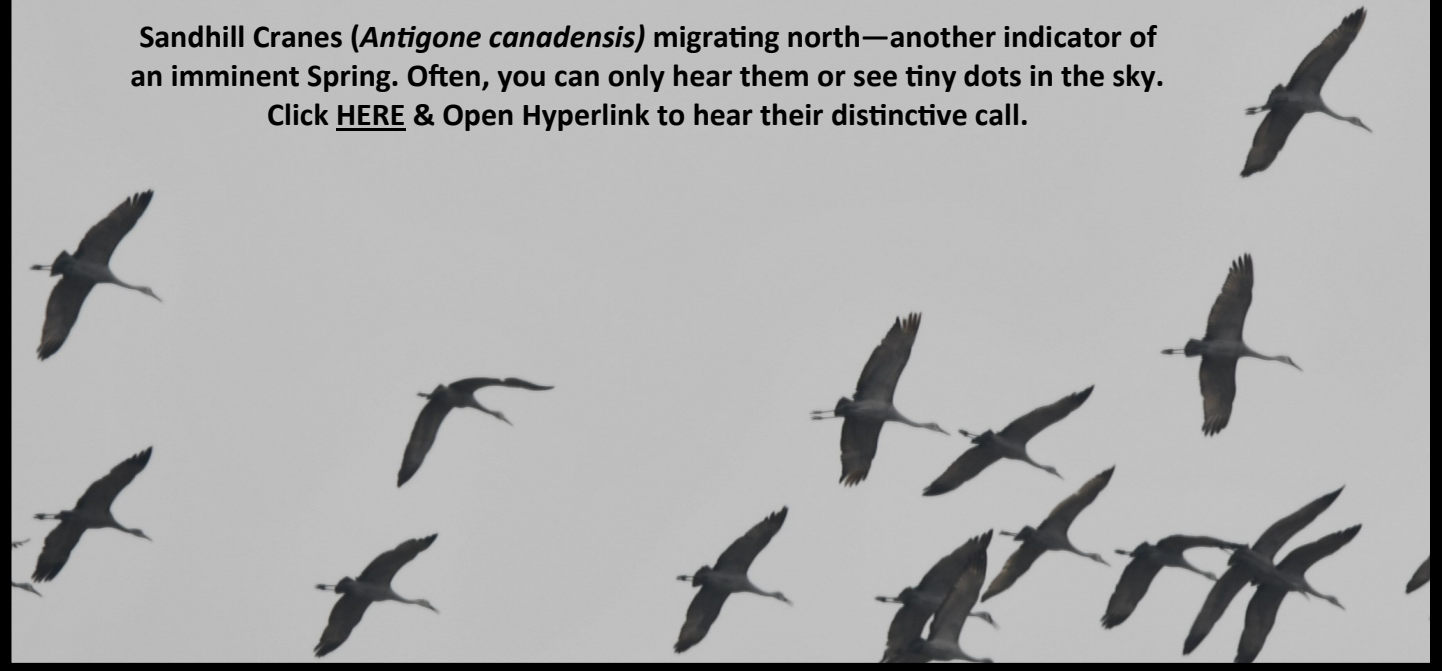


"No human ever lived in a birdless world."

Richard Smyth

Other Recent Avians at FNC

Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) migrating north—another indicator of an imminent Spring. Often, you can only hear them or see tiny dots in the sky. Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink to hear their distinctive call.



**Great Egret *Ardea alba*
Attacking its reflection?
A confused attempt at kissing?
Fighting over prey fish?
Making art?**



Photos by Dot Maginot



"Each species is a masterpiece, a creation assembled with extreme care and genius."

Edward O. Wilson

Do You Recognize this Cute Mammal?

Probably not, because I am seldom seen, coming above ground only to search for food or mates. But you probably will recognize the results of my incessant burrowing, as I am the most highly fossorial (i.e. "an animal that is adapted to digging and lives primarily underground") rodent found in North America. Accordingly, I prefer deep, sandy soils of grasslands or agricultural fields.

Males can excavate an area of 2500 sqft with tunnel lengths of 100-160 feet. As an herbivore, I tunnel in search of plant roots and to provide a safe nesting habitat which I must defend.

I provide an important ecological service in that my burrows are inhabited by many other species from insects to snakes, and I aerate the soil. I also offer a hearty dietary choice for snakes, preying mammals and birds.

If you are a gardener or farmer, you will have difficulty in appreciating my ecological value. Who am I?



Recognize these?



Photo by Dot Maginot

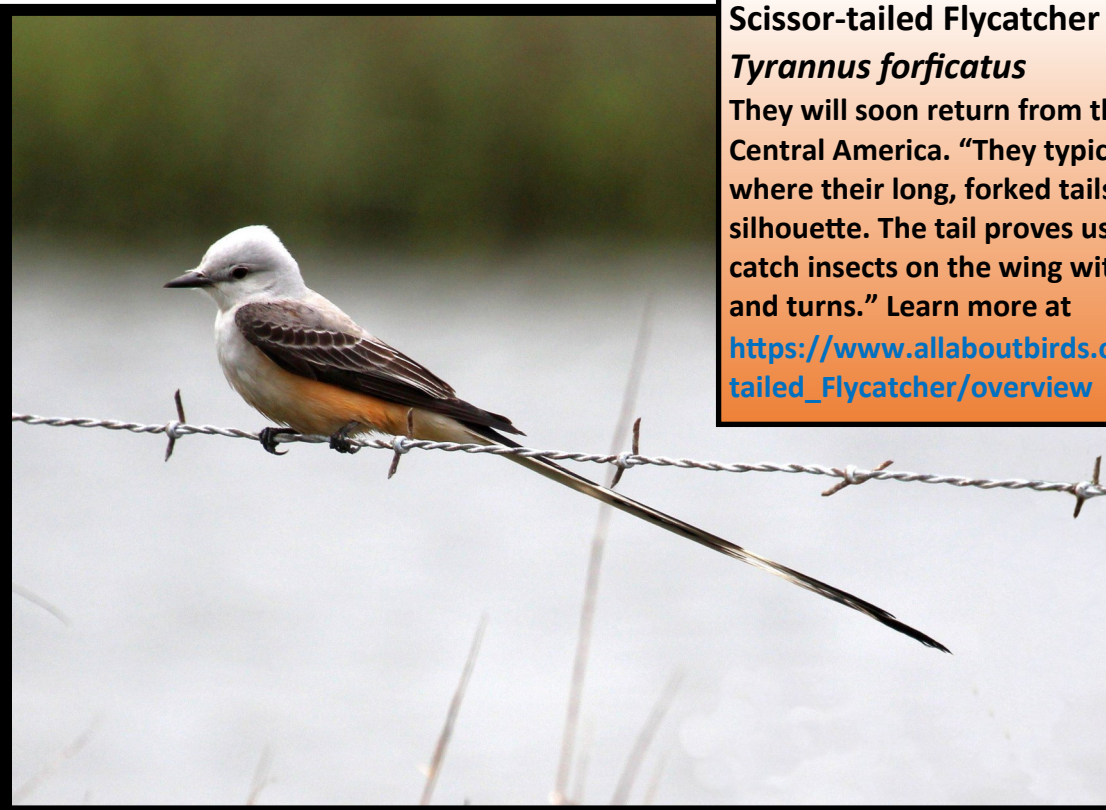
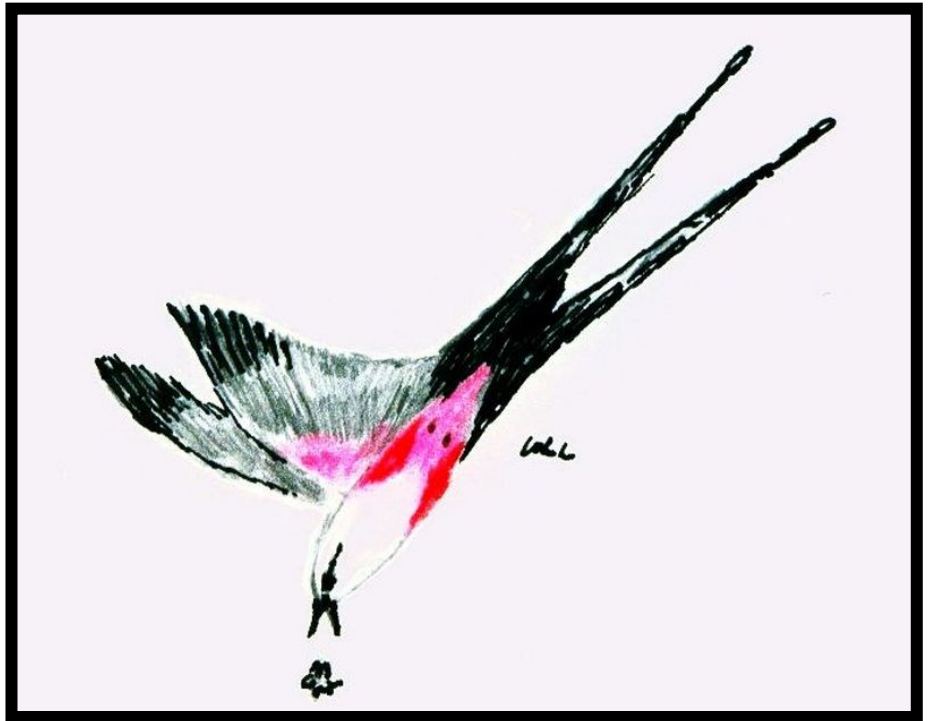
ANSWER:

**Plains Pocket Gopher
(*Geomys bursarius*)**

What's This Bill?

Bird Drawings & Photos by Bill Lindemann

In addition to founding FNC & FFNC, Bill was a geologist, birder, botanist, odontologist, writer, photographer, woodcarver, and artist. This new feature will showcase some of Bill's photos & attendant drawings. Enjoy!



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

Tyrannus forficatus

They will soon return from their winter sojourn in Central America. "They typically perch in the open, where their long, forked tails make an unmistakable silhouette. The tail proves useful as they expertly catch insects on the wing with sharp midair twists and turns." Learn more at

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Scissor-tailed_Flycatcher/overview



"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

Rachel Carson

Support FNC in 2024!

At FFNC, we believe that 2024 will be even more successful than 2023. We have plans for trail improvements focused on safety, expanding our educational programming, garden enhancements, & furthering our plans for an Interpretive Center. A large part of the formula for our success is your financial support.

Please consider becoming a Member of FFNC.

Our operations are funded by membership fees & donations.

Donate to the Bill Lindemann Capital Fund
which will fund our future Interpretive Center project.

[Go to https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/](https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/)

Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center Board of Directors

Lonnie Childs—President	Paul Person—Vice-president	Carl Luckenbach - Treasurer
Gracie Waggener—Secretary	Jane Crone	Trudy Eberhardt
Laura Grant	Billy Guin	Sandi Kennedy
Mary Ellen Terell	Andrea Schmidt, Dir. Fbg. Parks & Recreation, ex officio	

Thanks to our supporters and the City of Fredericksburg
for your continued support of the
Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center!

A 501(c)(3) corporation

Go to <http://fredericksburgNaturecenter.com/membership> for more information

Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to
Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at lonniechilds@utexas.edu